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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 9838
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SUBJECT: JAPAN FM TARO ASO'S AUGUST 3 VISIT TO BAGHDAD

Classified By: Ambassador J.Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

11. (C) Summary. MOFA DDG for Middle East Affairs Sugiyama on August 9 described U.S. support for FM Aso's August 3 visit to Baghdad as "a perfect operation." Aso made Japan's first-ever cabinet-level visit to send a clear message of Japan's support for Iraqi reconstruction and to encourage Japan's "people on the ground." In meetings with PM al-Malaki and FM Zebari, Aso stressed that his visit marked a "second stage" in Japan's continuing commitment to Iraq. End summary.

12. (C) MOFA Middle East and Economic Affairs Acting Director General Shinsuke Sugiyama called in Acting Political Minister Counselor on August 9 to formally express the government of Japan's appreciation for U.S. assistance in support of FM Taro Aso's August 3 visit to Iraq. Noting that FM Aso had specifically instructed Sugiyama to convey the foreign minister's deep appreciation, Sugiyama characterized the visit as a "perfect operation." Sugiyama had been one of three people to accompany Aso on his Baghdad visit, the others being Aso's private secretary Kazuyuki Yamazaki and a bodyguard.

13. (C) FM Aso, Sugiyama continued, decided to go to Iraq after determining that the timing of the visit would coincide with two important events: 1) the final "redeployment" of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) from Iraq back to Japan (Note: A total 5,500 GSDF personnel served in Samawah during the course of the entire deployment, Sugiyama observed.) and 2) the expansion of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) airlift support mission. FM Aso, in fact, flew in on the ASDF's second flight into Baghdad. Noting that some Japanese media had criticized FM Aso's visit as a politically-motivated stunt to gain support for his candidacy in September's LDP presidential election, Sugiyama said that the foreign minister saw at least two important reasons for the visit: 1) to send a clear message to both domestic and international audiences that Japan is committed to assist with Iraq's reconstruction, and 2) to encourage "our people on the ground" in Kuwait and Iraq by reinforcing the theme that they were doing a significant job.

14. (C) In meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, Aso stressed that his was the first visit by a Japanese cabinet member and that his visit was intended to convey Japan's continuing commitment to Iraqi reconstruction. Aso also emphasized that he viewed his Iraq visit as inaugurating a "second stage" in the bilateral relationship, following the election of the new Iraqi

government, the re-deployment of the GSDF and the expansion of the ASDF's role. In discussing Japan's 3.5 billion yen loan projects with FM Zebari, Zebari hinted that "turf issues" appeared to be slowing implementation and promised to start giving personal attention to the issue.

15. (C) Sugiyama concluded by saying that Japan intends to put "the most emphasis" on the U.S.-Japan bilateral relationship - in Iraq as well as in "the broader sense of alliance management."
SCHIEFFER